

Director's Report

Pandemic Update: All VR and VABIR staff continue to work remotely from home as Governor Scott has directed. Once the date was again extended through March 2021, we assumed our work at home situation was going to last at least until Vermonters were vaccinated. We have systematically upgraded home offices to support staff to feel connected to each other and to their customers. We have set the standard that video meetings with staff and consumers is the preferred mode of contact. We have established a set aside for the purchase of technology so that consumers can have an effective on-line presence. We are going to contract for a "tech coach", similar to our car coach to advise counselors and consumers on their tech needs.

Budget: We are in very good fiscal shape for several reasons. We have been fiscally conservative, so we are able to carry over significant federal funds into the new federal fiscal year. The state has been able to maximize the use of stimulus funds to balance this year's state budget. And, perhaps most importantly, we were awarded \$5.1 million dollars in reallocation funds.

We have two work groups focused on developing strategic plans for the expenditure of our reallocation dollars: one on services to students and one for adults. Examples of projects planned include a large summer youth employment program, the purchase of several modified vans for employed people who need them, expansion of training programs for in-demand occupations, i.e. healthcare and construction. As our plans roll out, we will definitely keep the SRC members in the loop. We would welcome any ideas you may have about needed goods and services to meet the vocational needs of Vermonters.

We are clearly concerned about the state budget going into state fiscal year 2022. There must be another stimulus package to fill a roughly projected \$200 million hole in the state's budget. I am very hopeful that early next year there will be another stimulus bill passed. If not, there will dire impacts on state services.

Youth Apprenticeships: Sadly, we were not awarded the Youth Apprenticeship grant we applied for to US Department of Labor. We have continued the effort

and plan to invest in apprenticeships with our reallocation funds. We are exploring financial services, construction and health care.

Kessler Foundation Grant: After about 9 months, we finally were notified that our Kessler grant request to accept funds had gone to the Joint Fiscal Committee for their consideration. We anticipate approval in about 30 days. While we have done a soft launch with surprising early results, we plan a robust launch including recruitment in early spring. At the top of our list is hiring another benefits counselor giving us six BCs each covering two offices in a region.

College Compass: We have expanded our partnership with College Steps to offer College Compass at the CCV site in Central Vermont. This a pilot which we hope will be successful and lead to expansion to all CCV locations across Vermont. This would make College Compass support services available and accessible to all young adults with disabilities. We continue at Castleton and Northern Vermont University. It might be interesting to invite Tara Howe and Chris Kennedy to present on the program at a full SRC meeting.

Career Initiatives Dashboard: We rolled out our dashboard in 2019 and have been improving and enhancing it ever since that time. We made certain hypotheses about our five lead indicators and the impact they would have on our new Common Performance Measures in WIOA. We feel very affirmed as the CPMs are seeing modest improvements and we believe we are on the right track. I will try to have the numbers for you to share at our meeting on Thursday. We are doing very well on three of the five lead indicators: teaming, higher wage job goals and follow along. We need to improve in assessment and education and training. We are hard at work to develop local and statewide strategies to improve those percentages. Inviting Alice to an SRC meeting to update on the dashboard might be very helpful to members.

Working People with Disabilities: Setting the record straight: We partnered with DBVI, the DD Council, VCIL, the SILC to fund Public Assets Institute to write a series of white papers on the status of Vermonters with disabilities. The first one was recently released. The link is on all the partners websites. It is very well done. We modeled the effort around Change the Story about women in the workplace. Sam approached me with the idea over two years ago and we

persevered until completion. We are going to work with a marketing firm to do a major release early next year.

It has been a very difficult year. I think we can see the light at the end of the tunnel but the next couple of months could be tough. I wish you a healthy and happy new year.

Diane

12/3/20